

Good afternoon Senator Tipping and Representative Roeder, and the honorable members of the Committee on Labor and Housing.

My name is Brendan Prast and I am a family doctor in Portland, Maine, and the Chair of the statewide advocacy organization Maine Providers Standing Up for Healthcare. I am testifying in favor of LD 1964, "An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program."

For myself and many of my patients, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how difficult balancing work and family responsibilities can be, and how many people struggle deciding whether or not to focus on their health, or their livelihood. This bill is a necessity - a benefit for workers to take extended periods of time off from work, without the risk of losing their jobs. As someone who cares for people of all ages, from newborns to the elderly, I know, with certainty, that Maine needs this paid family and medical leave. Every single person should be able to take off the time they need to care for themselves or their loved ones; but under our current system, that is not the case. I have patients with all different kinds of needs who have come to me for care. Many are directly affected by the lack of paid medical leave. For people with family members that need care, they have to choose between expensive private health workers, unsafe living conditions, or staying home from work very often. Unfortunately, since the pandemic, there has been a massive demand for these services that is still not filled - I see this in my patients who are caring for family members, or need care themselves. For those with chronic and severe medical conditions that require follow-up and special testing, they can fall months behind on these treatments because they cannot afford to risk their jobs. For my patients who are pregnant or post-birth - whether recovering from a C-section or trying to bond with their newborn - they are forced to return to work sooner than they should just to make ends meet. This can have drastic consequences - for the health of the birth parent, and for the health and development of their child. I have had patients who are no longer able to breastfeed after going back to work - both from the schedule change and from the body's natural response. For my patients struggling with severe mental health conditions, the barrier to care is doubled. The dangerous combination of a lack of paid medical leave and a massive shortage of mental healthcare providers have made it so these patients have no dedicated care months after I have referred them.

I have family and friends in Massachusetts, and I'm able to attest to how well this policy works. Whether they're recovering from surgery or healing after pregnancy, they are able to take

the time off they need and not worry for their livelihood because their state has a successful paid medical leave policy for all workers. We need this model in Maine, so we can join the eleven other states that have paid family and medical leave programs.

As a doctor, I know how vital it is for people to have protections to care for themselves or their family members. It does not matter what your health is like – we will all get sick, and we will all need care. It is extraordinarily wrong to force people to choose between work or the health of themselves, or their families. As a family physician, I am tired of being forced to watch my patients' health deteriorate. I hope you will all consider my perspective, the voices of my patients, and the over 250 healthcare providers across the state in my organization.

Thank you.  
Brendan Prast